Mr. President,

I have the honor to speak on behalf of the members of the Human Security Network, a cross-regional Network composed of Austria, Chile, Costa Rica, Greece, Ireland, Jordan, Mali, Norway, Panama, Switzerland, Thailand, South Africa as an observer and my own country, Slovenia.

Let me start by thanking the delegation of Uruguay for convening this open debate. We also thank the Secretary General Mr Antonio Guterres, Vice President of the International Committee of the Red Cross Ms Christine Beerli and the deputy Executive Director for Advocacy of Human Rights Watch Mr Bruno Stagno Ugarte for their comprehensive briefings.

Mr. President,

It is not a new statement, we have heard it and said it many times before, both in this Chamber and elsewhere, however the said truth still persists – civilians continue to account for the vast majority of casualties in armed conflicts. Many times, we have also called for better prevention and response to large-scale violations of human rights or international humanitarian law in a timely and effective manner. However, we still continue to witness grave abuses and violence being perpetrated against civilians, especially women and children in armed conflicts and other situations of violence.

The protection of civilians in armed conflict is of utmost importance to the members of the Human Security Network. Security Council resolution 2286 adopted a year ago specifically recognized the particular challenges faced by humanitarian personnel engaged in medical duties and medical personnel. It was encouraging to see the wide support for the resolution which reaffirms among others the need for all parties to armed conflict to respect and ensure respect for international humanitarian law, and international human rights law, as applicable, and to facilitate the activities of humanitarian organizations, which adhere to the principles of humanity, neutrality, impartiality and independence in the provision of humanitarian assistance, including medical assistance.
We continue to note with grave concern that according to the latest report of the Secretary General, attacks on medical personnel and humanitarian personnel engaged in medical duties as well as medical facilities and patients continue at an alarming rate. The Human Security Network strongly condemns all violence, attacks and threats against the wounded and sick, humanitarian workers engaged in medical duties as well as medical and health personnel and facilities and deplores the long-term consequences of such attacks for the population and health-care systems of the countries concerned.

Thus, we encourage the parties and mediators to consider including provisions on the protection of medical personal and facilities in the drafting of peace agreements, including in the definition or principles of ceasefire and in security and monitoring provisions, where relevant.

Mr President,

The Secretary General's report provides yet another sobering testimony of grave situations civilians face in a number of conflict-affected countries. All of these situations need to be urgently and effectively addressed.

Focus must be placed on enhancing protection on the ground. We are witnessing that armed conflicts are increasingly waged in urban areas; therefore we must ensure that the civilian population is adequately protected. However, many parties have not only shown a blatant disregard for the principles of distinction, proportionality and necessity in the conduct of hostility, but have deliberately targeted civilian infrastructure. We therefore share the Secretary-General's concern regarding the harm caused by the use of explosive weapons with wide-area effects in populated areas and support his call for further measures to address this.

The Human Security Network advocates a people-centered, holistic approach to security. This includes a focus not only on the protection of civilians once a conflict situation occurs, but also on conflict prevention in a broader sense. We therefore share the Secretary-General's view that in the long term, the best way to protect civilians is to address the root causes of conflicts, build sustainable peace, promote human rights and the rule of law, strengthen governance and democratic institutions, and invest in inclusive and sustainable development.

In our view, peace and security, development and human rights are indivisible and interdependent and can only be achieved if the entire population, notably also women, can fully participate in these efforts. We thus continue to be committed to the implementation of the Women, Peace and Security Agenda.

Mr President,

Ensuring respect by all parties to a conflict for international humanitarian and human rights law is the first necessary step to enhance the protection of civilians. States must comply with their obligation to allow and facilitate rapid and unimpeded access of humanitarian relief for civilians in need and freedom of movement of humanitarian personnel. All parties to every armed conflict bear the responsibility of allowing and facilitating access for the delivery of such assistance.
In addition to enhancing compliance with international law and strengthening national protection capacities, we recognize the major role of the UN peacekeeping operations, the majority of which are mandated with protection-related tasks, in the protection of civilians, including in the area of prevention. In this respect the Human Security Network underlines the importance of clear and achievable mandates with sufficient resources and capabilities to fulfil the protection mandate.

Respect for and implementation of international humanitarian and human rights law are inextricably linked with ensuring accountability and the fight against impunity.

Accountability is a key element in the protection of civilians. States must comply with their obligations under international law, to hold accountable perpetrators of crime committed against civilians. The Human Security Network stresses the usefulness of Commissions of Inquiry and fact finding missions in investigating and substantiating alleged violations of international law, in particular international humanitarian law and human rights law. We also underscore the crucial role of international courts and tribunals in ensuring accountability. When States are unwilling or unable to bring perpetrators to justice, a referral to the International Criminal Court is a complementary means to avoid impunity and restore dignity to survivors of atrocities, their families and communities. We reiterate the importance of States’ cooperation in this respect.

Mr President,

We value the continued attention the Security Council is giving to this important issue and further call on the Security Council to strongly, systematically, consistently and promptly respond to all violations of international law in situations of armed conflicts. Neither silence, nor tolerance or impunity are an option. This is a message that should clearly emanate from this Security Council and one that must resonate with us all.